

INTAG SOLIDARITY NETWORK

Intag Solidarity Network-USA is an organization formed to act in solidarity with the people of the Intag region of Ecuador as they resist efforts by the Ecuadorian government, international financial institutions, and multinational corporations to build a large scale copper mine near the community of Junín. The organization was formed by several individuals from the United States who have spent time in Intag, and are seeking better methods for all of us to organize in the U.S. to support their resistance. Our solidarity consists of consulting with communities in Intag about how we can best support their struggle, and working with them to devise and implement appropriate programs. We seek to offer human, financial, and material resources. Our method of solidarity is informed by a process of critical self-critique, one designed to maintain awareness about the power relationships inherent to solidarity work.

INTAG

Since the early 1990s, the Intag region, located on the northwest slope of the Ecuadorian Andes, has been slated for large-scale copper mining – part of a national program launched by the Ecuadorian government with support from the World Bank. Mitsubishi arrived to Intag in 1993 and began exploring for copper along the southern flanks of the Toisan, a mountain range that predates the Andes and forms a natural border between Intag and the Cotacachi-Cayapas Ecological Reserve, the largest protected area in western Ecuador. Mitsubishi left four years later, however, only after local communities burned the company's mining camp (after removing, inventorying, and later returning its contents). The communities along the Toisan base much their opposition to mining on the Environmental Impact Assessment prepared by Mitsubishi. According to Mitsubishi's EIA, an open-pit copper mine would cause massive deforestation, leading to a process of desertification, contaminate local water sources, and, to make way for tailings ponds, would require the removal of 100 families from four communities.



In 2004, Ascendant Exploration – now called Ascendant Copper – ventured into Intag and began seeking local consent to continue mineral exploration. While the company does count some of the region's large and powerful landowners among its supporters, most of Intag's residents, particularly the communities closest to the mining concession, have outright rejected the possibility of mining in the region. The community closest to the concession, Junín, now maintains a constant check point on the road into the area to prevent company personnel from entering. Opposition to Ascendant

boiled over on December 10th 2005, when a group of approximately 70 people, from a gathering of 300 from 20 surrounding communities, burned a property Ascendant owned near Junín, in much the same way communities destroyed Mitsubishi's camp eight years earlier.

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THE INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS OBSERVER PROGRAM

The Observer Program is the primary project of the Intag Solidarity Network. It is a proactive approach for preventing violent conflict. Most human rights observer programs show up after the fact, sometimes when violence has already occurred. Human rights centers in Ecuador, such as Asamblea Permanente de Derechos Humanos (Permanent Assembly of Human Rights), are increasingly concerned about paramilitarization of the area. Armed supporters of mining are present. Human rights violations in the form of death threats, disinformation, blocking of roads, and disruption of public meetings have already occurred. All of this adds up to a campaign of low intensity conflict, in which paramilitarization is the next step. In February 2005 the community of Junin requested the presence of Observers in the face of escalating potential for abuse. More recently, in August 2005, a leading community activist whose life has been threatened requested an observer accompany him and stay with in his home with him and his family.

Since February 2005, Observers have been present almost continuously in the community of Junin. Support to sustain the program so far has come from a variety of sources. Many of the folks in the United States who have donated money and/or traveled to Junin are alumni of DePauw University. Alumni from the Class of 1973 to the Class of 2005 (as well as current students and faculty) have been instrumental in already raising almost \$2,000USD.

Recent graduates or current graduate students form the backbone of the Observers. By involving committed, young activists without established long-term careers we are able to send people with a fair amount of flexibility. However, most Observers have limited ability to self-finance their involvement (although they are asked to help finance their work in part). Serving as an Observer is also a significant financial sacrifice as ISN is currently unable to provide any sort of stipend. To find out how to contribute to this project, please visit www.intagsolidarity.org. Just \$200 places an Observer in the community for one month, with all of the money going directly into the community.



Links:

~ Defensa y Conservacion Ecologica de Intag
www.decoin.org

~ Periodico Intag
www.intagnewspaper.org

~ Mining Watch Canada
www.miningwatch.ca

~ Friends of the Earth Canada
www.foecanada.org

~ Ascendant Copper Corporation
www.ascendantcopper.com

~ Intag Solidarity Network
www.intagsolidarity.org